



Tanjore and Mysore

Schools of South Indian Paintings



Krishna-the flute player with two instruments players holding *Tanpura* and violin
Maratha period Tanjore style, Tamilnadu, mid 19th century

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Schools of South Indian Paintings

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National Museum, New Delhi

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Sheshayi Vishnu with his consort goddess Lakshmi and Brahma coming out of his naval
Maratha period Tanjore style, Tamilnadu, early 19th century

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Bala Krishna with flute

Maratha period Tanjore style, Tamilnadu, mid 19th century

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Shiva dancing - close up

Maratha period Tanjore style, Tamilnadu, mid 19th century

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Tanjore Painting



Krishna as Balaji worshipped by devotees
Maratha period Tanjore style, Tamilnadu, early 19th century

Tanjore, one of the most celebrated schools of Indian art and a highly visited temple site in South--- The Brihadeshwar Temple of Lord Shiva, was ever a great centre of music, architecture and other arts, though the world bowed to its unique talent, specially its brilliant paintings, only during last three-four decades. Today an art-lover's house, anywhere, is considered incomplete without a Tanjore painting.

Tanjore, a temple town in Tamilnadu, had an inherent talent to adorn its temples' walls with religious murals. Recurring British inroads during the 17th and early 18th century deprived it from art activity for some time but after the Maratha ruler Serfoji II, who gave to the region a stable fifty-five

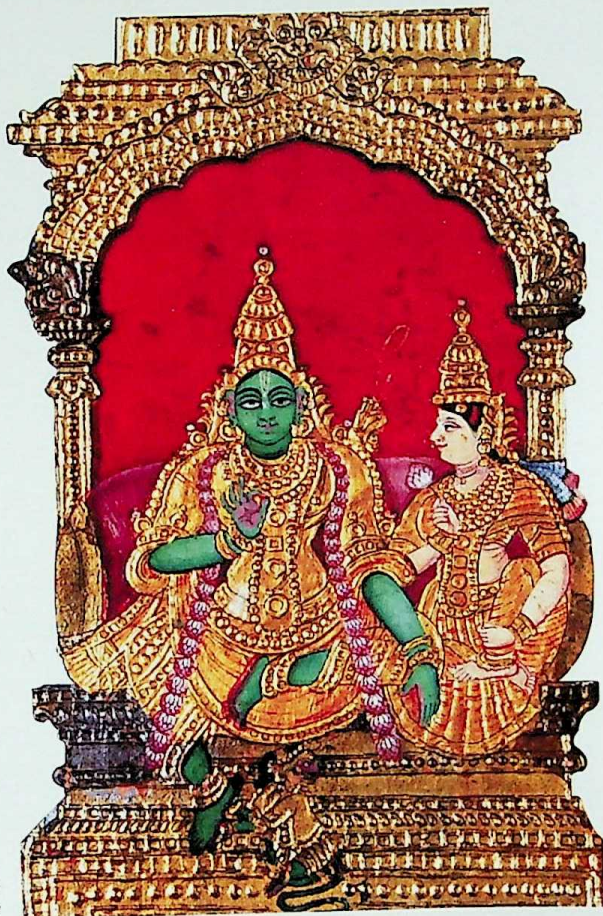


Lord Shiva with Parvati seated on their vehicle Nandi - the Bull
Maratha period Tanjore style, Tamilnadu, early 19th century

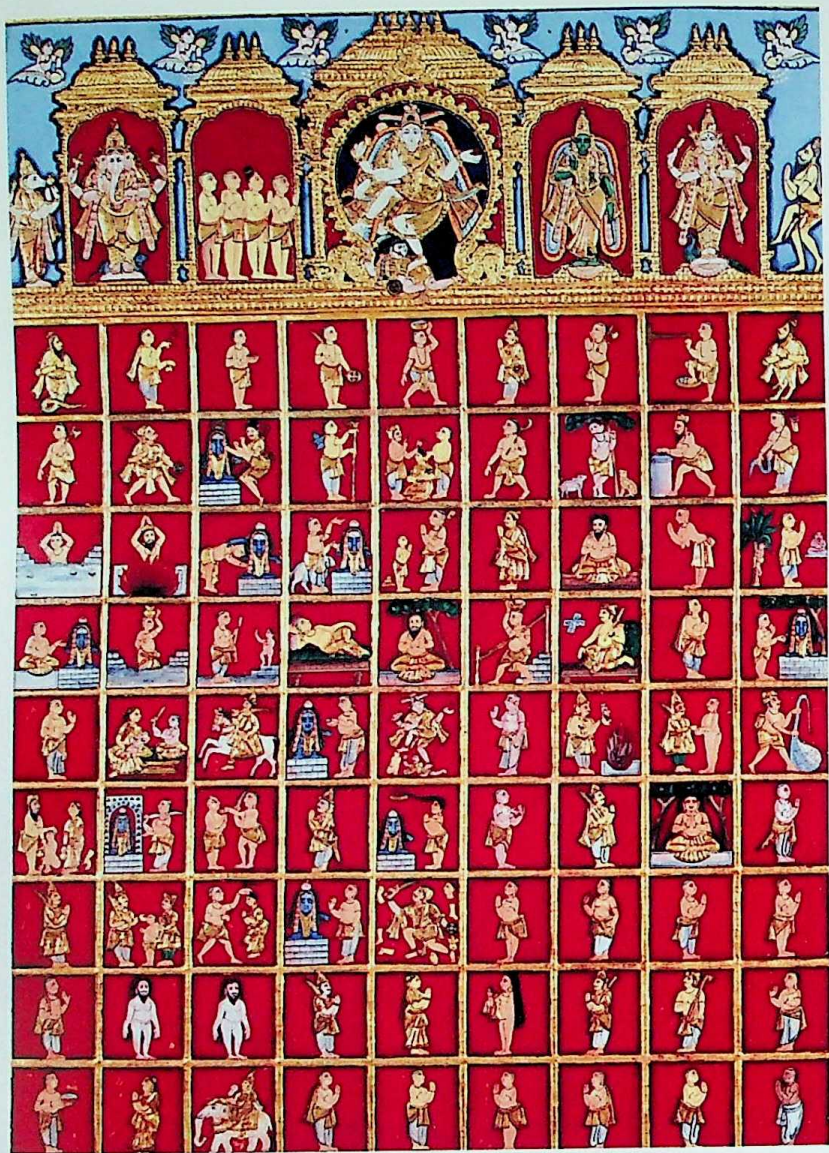
years rule from 1778 to 1833. Tanjore regained its past glory and a new phase of creativity began. Its most glaring aspect was its painting, broadly, a trans-shift of a theme and the medium representing it from the temple wall to canvas. An essentially votive painting, it pursued the visual line of Vaishnavism and Shaivism, but with a secular spirit hardly ever seeking to mystify or mythicise its subject. Some Krishna-*lila* and durbar themes apart, Tanjore paintings are mostly portraits, divine or human. It loved painting Krishna as child, Rama with great reverence and Shiva as Nataraja.

Tanjore painting has a brilliant and jewel-like rich look which its artists

Digitized by Sarayu Foundation Trust, Delhi and eGangotri created by judiciously using real gold and silver foils, precious and semi-precious stones, beads, mirrors, powdered metals – gold in particular, besides primary colours – red, green, blue, black and white in their basic tones. In Tanjore paintings, the blue-hued Krishna turns pinkish having marble's translucence and butter-like softness. Vishnu, Rama, Bharata, Vishnu's other incarnations all have in Tanjore art the green body colour. Sometimes a patron's astrologer decided which stones and colours a patron should use in the painting he commissioned. The patron some times believed that his jewels were God's custody with him, and hence sought to lay them with His canvas image believing that he would be thus Divine custody's mere keeper, not owner.



Rama and Sita
Maratha period, Tanjore style,
Tamilnadu, early 19th century



Shiva Lila - Dancing Shiva with Parvati, Ganesha and Karttikeya
Maratha period Tanjore style, Tamilnadu, mid 19th century

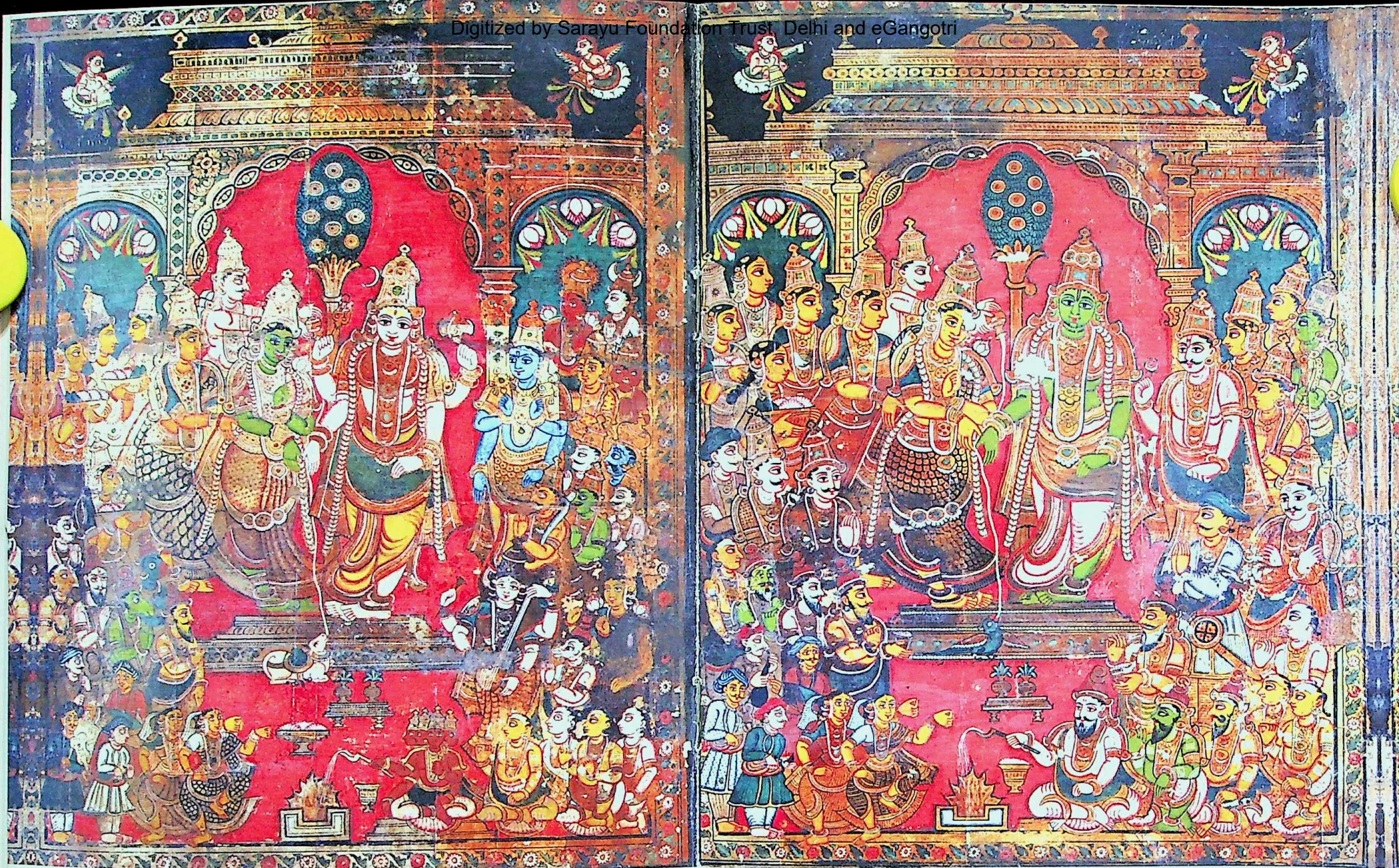
Mysore Painting

Mysore school sprang in south Karnataka in the period of revival of old art traditions, during the time of Mummadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar, when music, dance, literature and the Fine arts flourished under his discerning patronage. Most of the traditional paintings of Karnataka which have survived can be ascribed to his times. They present a wide variety, from murals to the stylistic Mysore paintings on cloth, paper and wood.

The techniques adopted by the Mysore artists are slightly different from those of the Tanjore school. While the latter used white lead (*safeda*) *Makhi*, Gamboge (yellow) drawn from the juice of the indigenous tree



Sandhya Tandava of Shiva - Lord Shiva dancing before Parvati
Tanjore-Mysore mixed style, Karnataka, late 18th century



Girija and Sita Kalyanam - The marriage ceremony of Shiva Parvati, Rama and Sita
Mysore style, Karnataka, end of 18th century

(*Revana Chinnihalu*) was used, and this gives a slightly golden tint. As against the high relief of the Tanjore 'Gesso' work, the Mysore school preferred low relief, and used pure gold leaf against the gold-coated silver leaf handled by Tanjore artists. This purity of gold leaf enhanced the lustre of the Mysore paintings and made their work more durable. This decoration with gold leaf had been described and the burnishing modes explained already in the Deccani text of the 11th century (*Manasollace*). The use of glass pieces and pearls employed in the Tanjore style is also absent in the Mysore paintings. More elaborate residential landscape is also seen in the latter, side by side with traditional temple models of pavilions and towers, liked by both the schools.

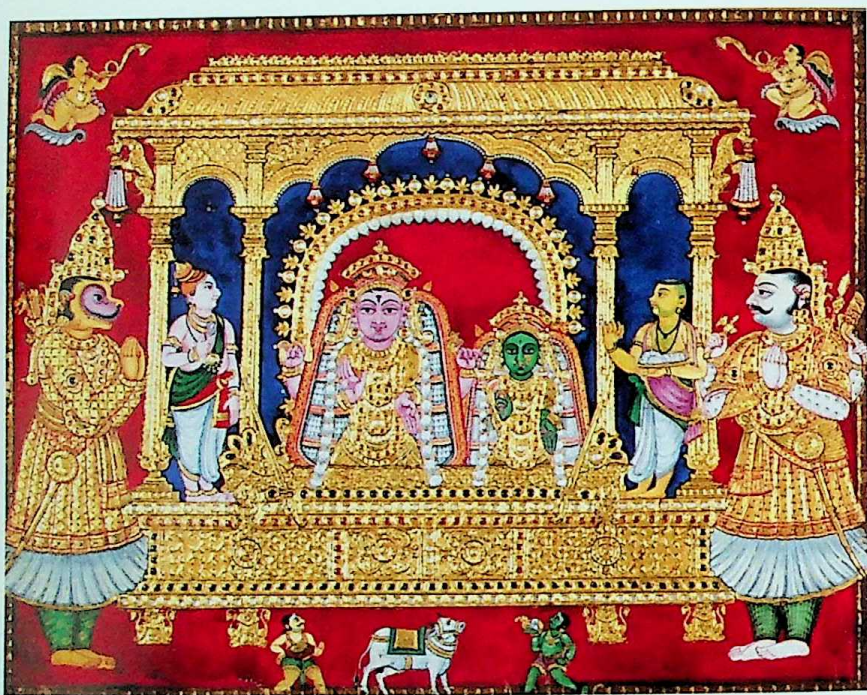
The popular themes of the Mysore school are common with those of Tanjore, like mythology, the Epics, the *Bhagavata Purana* dealing with the exploits of Krishna, and the various aspects of goddesses related to Vishnu and Shiva. All the same, the multiple cultural impacts of the Upper Indian, Deccani and the lower Southern zones on the Mysore region in the centuries of the mediaeval kingdoms, are seen reflected in the less conventional, varied and more individualistic selections of themes and portrayal thereof. The story of Siva as hunter (*Kirata*) with Arjuna, so popular over the centuries in Karnataka; or the special manifestations of Devi as Rajarajeswari and in special esoteric worship styles, which was the influence of the historic Sringeri *Sarada pitha* or *Matha* of Mysore, have all contributed to this stylistic distinction of the Mysore school. There are also many interactions between the two schools, and the common factors like the Maratha influence, as seen in the unique Baramasa series of paintings of the Andhra-Mysore mixed style.

The linear connotation of these south Indian paintings create a semblance of three dimensional effect, using light and shade, low relief

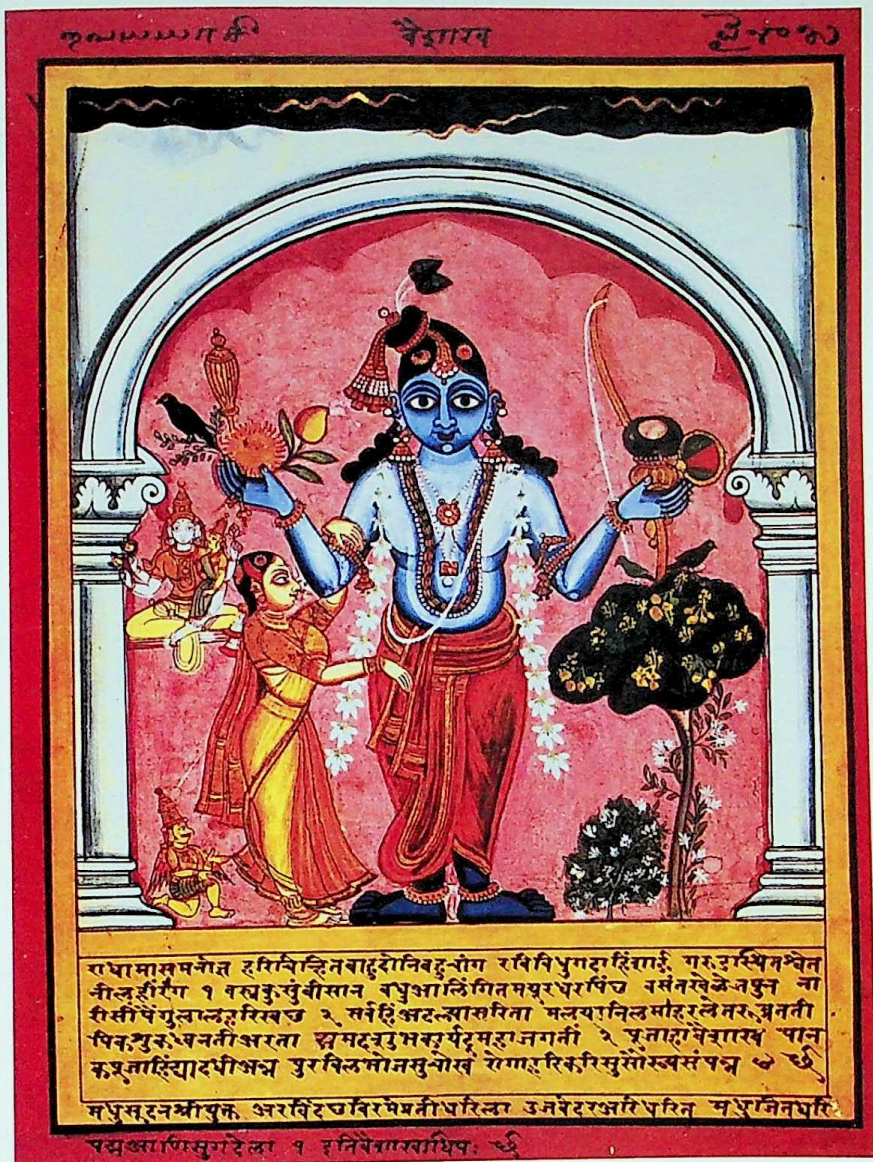
The Cosmic form of Krishna Vasudeva
Mysore style, Karnataka, end of 19th century



modelling which is achieved through application of successive thick coating of glues, colours, embedded cut stones and manipulation of varying planes. In historical perspective, the paintings of Mysore and Tanjore Schools stand somewhere between the two Indian traditions: (a) wall paintings and miniature paintings, and (b) sculptures carved in very low relief in order to render themes in the narrative style; however, naturalism, as seen in European Renaissance painting, was not the concern of the South Indian artists, and anatomical details were executed conceptually rather than as per the norms of optical realism. Bright and warm colours were used essentially to heighten decorative elements which fitted well with, what is generally termed as, the 'court style'.



Hanumana and Indra paying homage to Shiva Parvati in a temple shrine
Maratha period Tanjore style, Tamilnadu, early 19th century

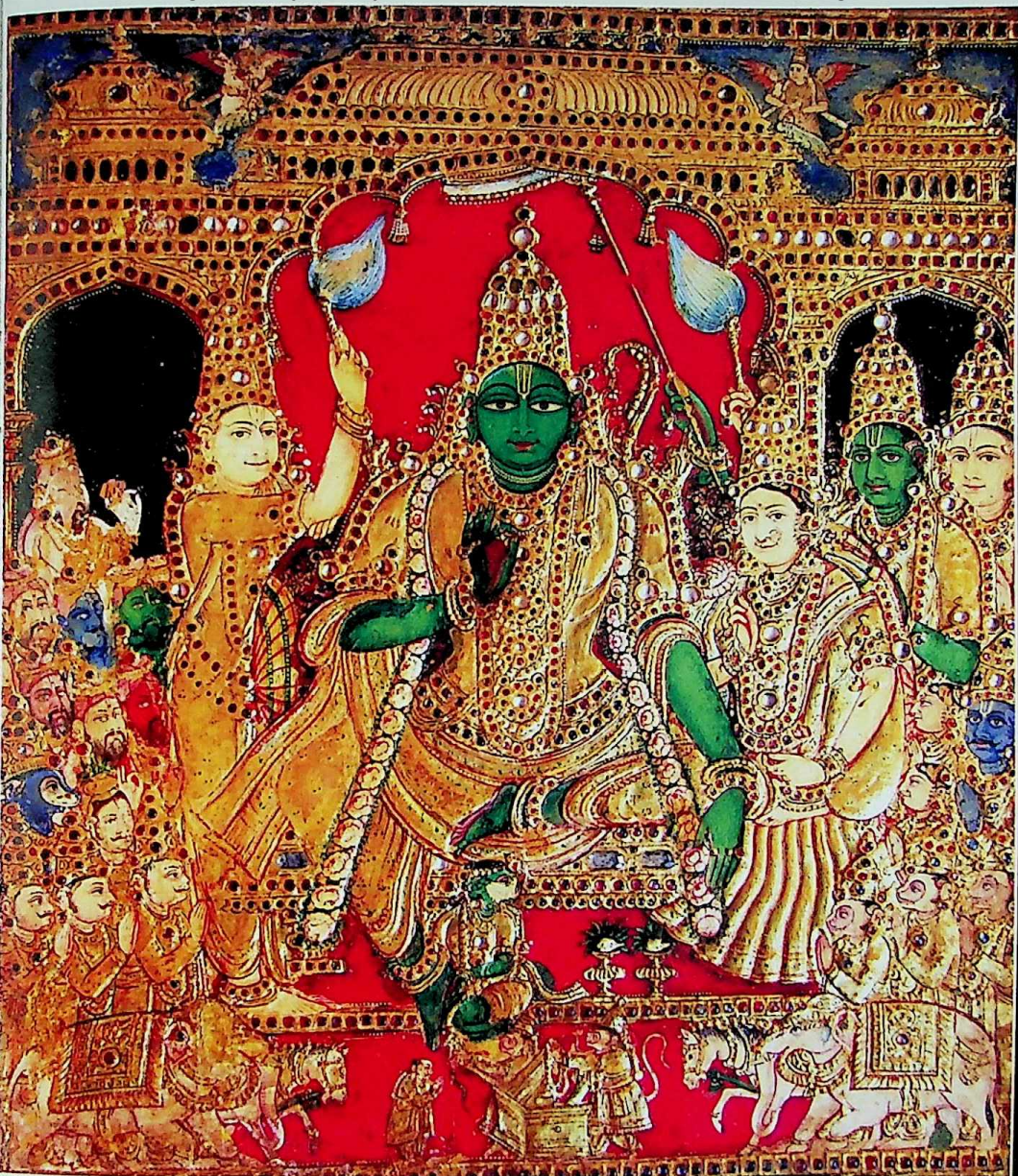


Vaishakha - The month of April - May, Based on Marathi Baramasa poetry
Andhra - Mysore mixed style, mid 18th century

In substance, the format of these paintings of Mysore and Tanjore Schools is very different from the traditional miniature paintings which are considerably smaller in size and intimate in character. By and large, gold leaf and /or gold dust was used in Indian miniature paintings for highlighting certain decorative motifs or elements, whereas these were elaborately applied in successive picture planes ending the background in Mysore and Tanjore paintings, primarily to echo the sense of dazzling splendour of royalty. In a way, it was a sort of logical necessity during the 18th – 19th centuries when European style had started influencing architectural interiors in order to project the richness and extravagant life style of our princes and *rajas*.

In the past, South Indian paintings of Mysore and Tanjore Schools were cherished more for religious worship and to evoke pious sentiments rather than for their aesthetic impact. Initially, they did not catch the attention of the museum directors, art connoisseurs and art collectors. Of late, however, this situation has changed dramatically. In the past two decades, these paintings of Mysore and Tanjore Schools have been highly treasured, and are so much in demand that different centres have started producing forged copies of such South Indian paintings and art dealers are selling them as genuine to innocent but enthusiastic young collectors. The common practice is to mount the new painting, i.e., the forgeries, in old frames, ensuring some forced deterioration and over-painting or retouching certain areas so that they acquire an antique look.

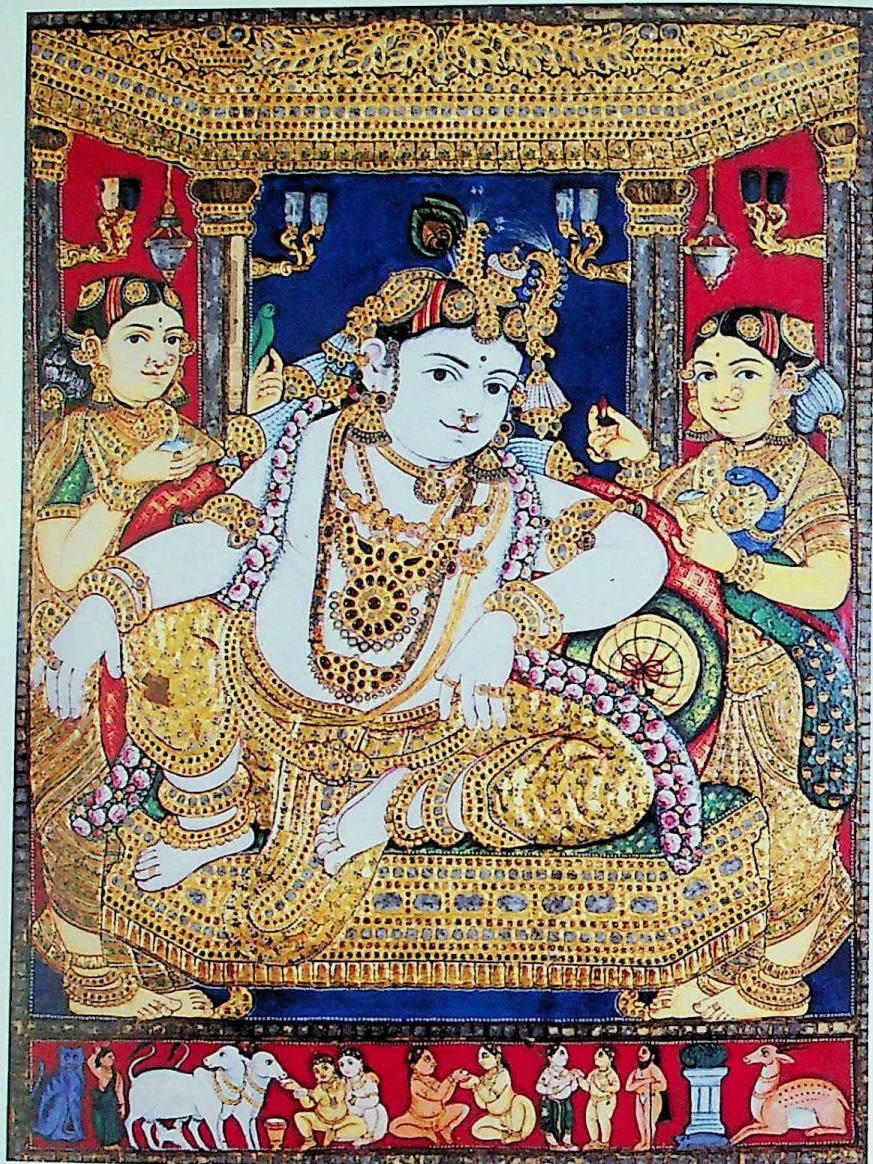
The display of the choicest among the characteristic paintings of these two late mediaeval Southern schools, on special view here, would reveal the grand admixture of traditional, spiritual and eclectic strains in Indian art streams, which is part of the national personality itself of India.



Rama with Sita seated on the throne of Ayodhya after his coronation

Maratha period Tanjore style, Tamilnadu, early 19th century

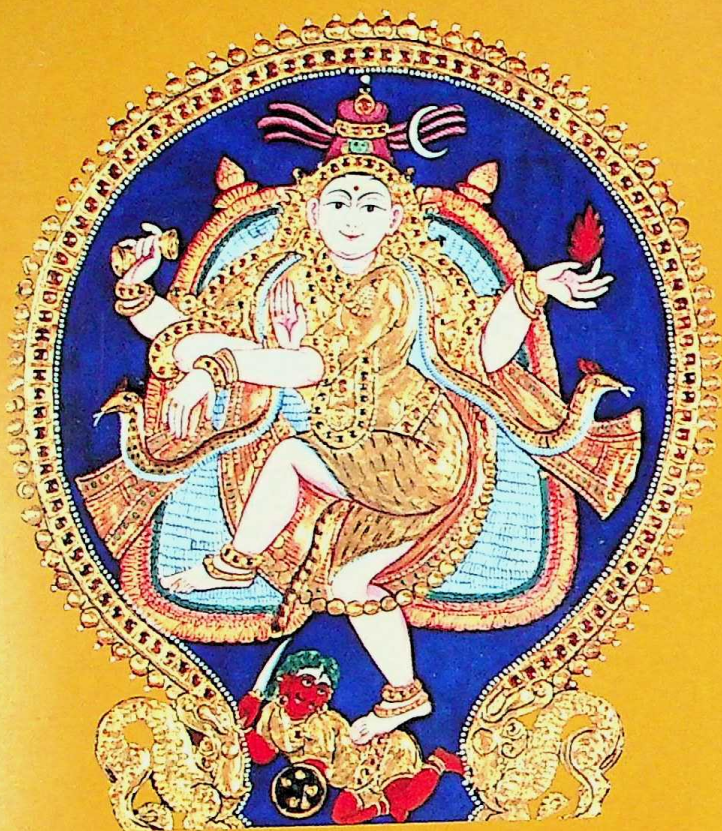
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Bejewelled child Krishna seated on a golden throne like a king
Maratha period Tanjore style, Tamilnadu, early 19th century



Garuda with a devotee paying homage to Lord Vishnu and goddess Lakshmi
Maratha period Tanjore style, Tamilnadu, mid 19th century



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